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## Iraq war diverts attention from the war on terror

By TAMMY BALDWIN

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On the second anniversary of Sept. 11, our nation reflects with sadness on events and losses no one will ever forget.

Americans want to know if they're safer now than on that tragic day. The answer is complex, depending on how efforts against terrorism are judged. While airliners are more secure and our collective awareness is heightened, I fear the sharp focus needed to find those responsible for 9-11 and those with similar plans has been distracted.

When was the last time you heard President Bush utter the name Osama bin Laden? It appears that our drive to combat al-Qaida took a U-turn on the way to Baghdad.

The justification for this war was to help fight terrorism and stop the imminent production of weapons of mass destruction. We now know these were tenuous assertions at best. The war in Iraq is becoming counterproductive to the fight against terrorism. Instability in Iraq created conditions ripe for more terrorism. Reports indicate that terrorists are moving from neighboring nations to lash out at our brave servicemen and women.

Before the war, I asked the president some questions. Is the Iraqi threat to the United States imminent? How much will the war cost? What is our exit strategy? I never received an answer, nor have the American people.

The sad fact is that the war's end, while officially announced, is nowhere in sight. Many of us who opposed it felt our pre-emptive action would drive a wedge between America and our allies. We felt it would distract from the pressing need to combat terrorism and the cost, while difficult to calculate, would be astronomical.

All those fears have come true. With a projected deficit at \$500 billion, some very real homeland security needs go unmet. Our nation's ports, power plants and other crucial

infrastructure remain vulnerable. Our first responders are underfunded.

Thankfully, our law enforcement has cracked down on terrorist money laundering operations, strengthened coordination of global intelligence and done much to make us safer. Just think of how effective this would be if our efforts to combat terrorism weren't diluted by the financial drain, logistical problems and international strain that the war in Iraq has become.

*Rep. Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat from Madison, represents Wisconsin's 2nd Congressional District.*

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